

El Malpais National Monument
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EL Malpais National Monument

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



Wilderness/Backcountry Management Plan Newsletter

February 2006

From the Superintendent

Dear Friends:

The National Park Service is preparing a plan to manage the backcountry and wilderness areas of El Malpais National Monument. The purpose of the plan is to help preserve wilderness and protect the elements that comprise backcountry lands at El Malpais while providing for the enjoyment of those lands by the public. The plan will cover lands that are recommended for wilderness designation, lands determined as potential wilderness, and undeveloped "backcountry" monument lands that are not within the wilderness boundaries. The proposed plan will provide a wilderness vision, management goals and objectives, and implementation strategies to accomplish the goals and objectives. A map of the park's wilderness areas and a set of the draft plan

goals and objectives are included in this newsletter.

The Wilderness/Backcountry Management Plan will be prepared with an Environmental Assessment (EA) of the environment, in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). A range of alternative management scenarios and the potential impacts associated with those scenarios will be included in the plan/environmental assessment.

Your participation in the planning process is essential in the preparation of a successful Wilderness/Backcountry Management Plan. This newsletter serves to provide you information about the planning process, as well as to invite you to share your thoughts about wilderness and wilderness management at El Malpais National Monument. I invite you to submit your



written comments pertaining to this project (please respond by April 1, 2006), and I look forward to working with you in this endeavor to preserve and protect our wilderness and the unique resources within it.

Sincerely,

Kayci Cook Collins
Superintendent,
El Malpais National Monument

The purpose of the El Malpais Wilderness/Backcountry Management Plan is to guide the park in managing the wilderness resource and backcountry areas in the monument; to preserve the natural and cultural resources, scenic beauty, wilderness values; and to provide for the enjoyment of wilderness by the public. The plan will serve as a public document as well as a working guide for staff that explains a wilderness management vision, goals and objectives, and actions taken to preserve and protect wilderness at El Malpais National Monument.



Wilderness /Backcountry Management Plan Schedule

Winter 2005/2006

- Public and agency scoping of wilderness planning issues and opportunities
- Gather relevant data
- Analyze issues and affected wilderness resources

Summer 2006

- Write draft Wilderness/Backcountry Management Plan – Environmental Assessment
- Send plan out for review by public/agencies/tribes

Spring 2006

- Develop a range of potential management zones based on issues and resources
- Apply zones to resource areas in different management scenarios (range of alternatives)
- Identify impacts of alternatives

Fall 2006

- Address comments, release final Wilderness/Backcountry Management Plan – Environmental Assessment
- Regional Director signature of final approval of plan

About the Monument

El Malpais National Monument, located in Northwestern New Mexico within Cibola County, was established in 1987 (P.L. 100-225) "....to preserve, for the benefit and enjoyment of present and future generations, that area in western New Mexico containing the nationally significant grants Lava Flow, the Las Ventanas Chacoan Archeological Site, and other significant natural and cultural resources." The monument includes a diverse volcanic-derived landscape, with 10 major volcanic vents, 7 contiguous lava flows, and some of the longest lava tube systems in the country. The monument is almost entirely surrounded by the 261,800-acre El Malpais National Conservation area, which is administered by the Bureau of Land Management. The conservation area contains the Cebolla Wilderness Area (60,000 acres), the West Malpais Wilderness Area (38,210 acres), and the Chain of Craters Wilderness Study Area (17,468 acres). The Continental Divide National Scenic Trail runs through both the monument and conservation area.

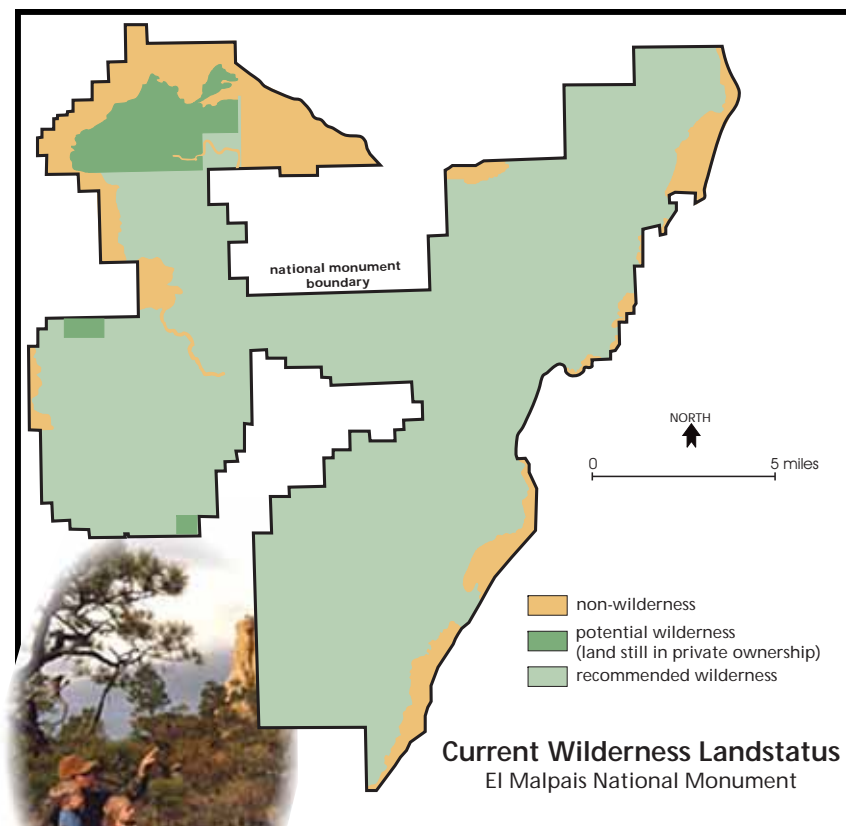
What is "Wilderness"?

Wilderness is a federal designation for lands that qualify under the definition. The Wilderness Act of 1964 defines Wilderness as:

"...an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammelled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain. An area of wilderness is further defined to mean in this Act an area of undeveloped Federal land retaining its primeval character and influence, without permanent improvements or human habitation, which is protected and managed so as to preserve its natural conditions and which (1) generally appears to have been affected primarily by the forces of nature, with the imprint of man's

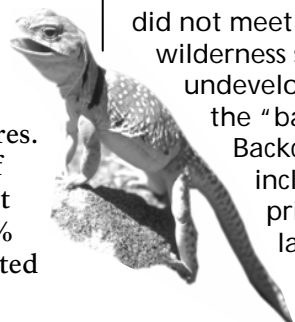
work substantially unnoticeable; (2) has outstanding opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation; (3) has at least five thousand acres of land or is of sufficient size as to make practicable its preservation and use in an unimpaired condition; and (4) may also contain ecological, geological, or other features of scientific, educational, scenic, or historical value."

Today, there are 662 wilderness areas in the United States totaling approximately 105,678,911 acres. Alaska contains 57,509,859 of the total acres, which is about 54% of the state. About 4.67% of the United States is protected as Wilderness.



Wilderness at El Malpais NM

As directed by the enabling legislation, the 1987 general management plan for the park recommended the suitability and non-suitability of all roadless areas of the monument, except those lands within the areas identified as "potential development area". Today, approximately 85% (97,428 acres) of the monument is managed as wilderness. Other areas within the monument boundaries that did not meet the criteria for wilderness suitability, but are undeveloped are called the "backcountry". Backcountry areas also include inholdings of privately-owned land and roads.



Significant Qualities of Wilderness Lands at El Malpais

Wilderness lands at El Malpais National Monument contain significant qualities that distinguish it from other lands. The NPS staff has summarized those qualities in four statements:

- The vast extent of the rugged, volcanic, lunar landscape will humble even those with superior navigation skills.
- The nature of the landscape coupled with the diverse cultural heritage of this region, has uniquely shaped the human experience of El Malpais and limited contemporary development.
- The age and type of lava flows present a vastly different landscape and terrain, resulting in different physical challenges, risks, and personal reward.
- Different lava flows greatly influence natural systems and processes, encapsulating unique assemblages of kipukas, lava tubes, and caves that create a variety of wilderness experiences.

Issues and Opportunities



Wilderness and Backcountry Management

- How should wilderness and non-wilderness backcountry areas be managed?
- What resource protection and visitor use and experience opportunities are appropriate in wilderness and backcountry areas?

Neighboring Agencies

- How can wilderness management be best

coordinated with adjacent BLM wilderness lands, given each agency's mission?

Cultural Resources

- What concerns do American Indian groups have regarding traditional use and access to Traditional Cultural Properties?

Caves

- How should the monument's caves be protected while allowing for a wilderness or backcountry experience?

Route Delineation

- Given the terrain, could the location of the Continental Divide Trail be improved, and how should it and other popular routes be marked?

Plan Objectives

- Provide a document that identifies the vision, goals, objectives, and actions to manage the wilderness and backcountry at El Malpais National Monument.
- Serve as guidance for field and management staff in application of wilderness management techniques and integration of wilderness and backcountry management objectives into other park management documents.
- Coordinate with adjacent land management agencies to provide continuity, where possible and appropriate, in managing the wilderness' and backcountry natural ecosystem processes and cultural resources.
- Provide a broad range of opportunities to facilitate wilderness and backcountry use while protecting the wilderness resources.
- Apply policies consistently, thereby enhancing wilderness users' experiences and ensuring compliance with wilderness regulations.
- Develop and implement a public information and educational program to promote Leave No Trace skills and wilderness ethics in order to reduce behaviors that are harmful to natural and cultural resources and experiences.
- Instill and apply the Minimum Requirement Concept into management actions and practices.
- Base management decisions on sound scientific research. Incorporate new data and information, as necessary, into a dynamic wilderness and backcountry management program.
- Identify and preserve the outstanding remarkable values of the park backcountry/wilderness.